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Roundtable Interview of the President by Foreign Print Media

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 [White House News](#)

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks. Looking forward to my trip. As you all know, the itinerary is South Korea, Thailand and then China. China will be a mix of -- South Korea will be all diplomacy; get a chance to see my friend, the President; a good discussion about common issues. I'll see the Prime Minister of Thailand for a nice dinner. He'll have some interesting events related to Burma the next day. And then of course we go into China for the Olympics, but there will be a fair amount of diplomacy while I'm there.

And I'm really looking forward to it -- looking forward to it because, one, my good wife will be going with me and I love to travel with her. Secondly, one of my daughters is going with me, which will be fun. And my brother will be going with me. And in China I'll be meeting my father, who will be traveling with my sister.

Q A big family reunion, Mr. President. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: It sounds that way. Anyway, I'm looking forward to it, I'm excited to go. Relations with the three nations that I have just described are good, strong. My trip will help advance them, the relations.

And I'll also be giving a speech in Thailand about our foreign policy in the Far East, where I will be leaving this foreign policy in six months. I will also remind people that I will be sprinting to the finish, that I will finish this job strong. And so I want to thank you for coming by and giving me a chance to visit with you. We'll go a couple of rounds here.

Kenneth.

Q Thank you, sir. It's a long question and I'll probably -- I don't know how to put it, but your strongest allies in Asia are Korea and Japan, recently on a tug-of-war game these days over this little island called Dokdo. And I know it's -- Koreans get very upset because every time --

THE PRESIDENT: I want to make some news with you.

Q Pardon me?

THE PRESIDENT: I'll make some news for you today.

Q Yes, sir, that would be great -- (laughter) -- because, you know, Koreans get upset over this island because whenever the Japanese mention that -- you know, it's like the Japanese expansionism in the region and so on. You know, when the U.S. --

THE PRESIDENT: Get ready.

Q Yes, so --

THE PRESIDENT: Are you ready for some news?

Q I am ready for some news, please.

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, this dispute will be settled by Japan and South Korea. As to the database, I asked Condi Rice to review it and the database will be restored to where it was prior -- seven days ago.

Q Thank you, sir. That's big news. (Laughter.) It is news.

THE PRESIDENT: It is big news.

Q Right. And I think Koreans will really appreciate that, because --

THE PRESIDENT: Congratulations on breaking this. (Laughter.)

Q Do you have some vision regarding to this, like, U.S.-Korea-Japan sort of trilateral cooperation when you go to Korea?

THE PRESIDENT: Between?

Q The U.S., Korea and Japan.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, look, part of my -- one of the reasons why it's very important for the United States to have an active presence and to establish good bilateral relations with the countries in the region is to help foster good relations between countries -- whether it be South Korea and Japan, or Japan and China, it's essential. And it's in our national interest that South Korea have good relations with Japan. And I understand there's tensions. I listen very carefully to the respected leaders.

But first of all, we can't fix certain disputes; that will be up to the sovereign governments. But we can help facilitate dialogue. We can help facilitate understandings. And so I think it's very important for the United States to be very active and have a good, solid presence and have vibrant diplomacy -- which is what this administration has had.

Part of the reason that I'm stopping in South Korea prior to going to the Olympics -- I mean, one could have attempted just to go straight to the Olympics, but I want to come to South Korea -- I had just come from Japan, and it's all part of making sure that our foreign policy is active. I would hope that no President would ever dial us out of the Far East. Quite the contrary, I think it's very important for us to stay actively engaged in the Far East.

And one such multilateral engagement is the six-party talks, all aimed at keeping -- dealing with a very delicate issue, but with five partners sending the same message to your neighbor to the north. So it's part of a foreign policy vision that's multilateral in nature, with strong bilateral relations that help create an atmosphere in which old grievances and new issues can be solved in a peaceful way.

Q Are you going to deliver the FTA message to Koreans?

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely; delivered it yesterday. Went to a meeting of the South Korean-U.S. Business Alliance for a reason -- I went in there to make it clear that this administration absolutely thinks it's essential that Congress pass the Korean FTA. And I will deliver it again because I know the President is concerned about whether or not -- you know, he hears talk out of the Congress and I will assure him that this free trade agreement is in our interest, in South Korea's interest, and that we want to get it done.

Q Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Pichai.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned just now that in Bangkok you're going to be sending a message of U.S. commitment to foreign policy, what your views are, and that you're going to sprint to the finish. Just, in two parts, some would argue that during your presidency, you know, obviously the U.S. is focused on the war on terror -- Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq -- and that meant probably in the views of some that the U.S. was less engaged in Asia,

especially vis-à-vis countering the influence of China, which has grown; and that basically your foreign policy has been pretty much like previous administrations, which lacked more higher level of proactive stance, some compared it to the Shultz period. How would you describe your legacy under your presidency for Asia and U.S.-ASEAN relations?

And point number two, looking ahead with the changes happening with India growing stronger, China growing stronger, that's going to change the dynamics of the region and the U.S. is a global player in the world. How do you see U.S. role in that region in the future?

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me start with the second, then you can refresh my 62-year-old memory for the first. (Laughter.)

There's plenty of room for countries to work with -- the three countries you mentioned with other countries in the region in a constructive way. In other words, I don't view the diplomacy as zero sum, it's got to be either this country or that country. India and China and the United States will provide great opportunities for entrepreneurs, businesses, throughout the region. And they'll provide great opportunities for development of services and goods that people in our big markets want. It provides great opportunities for capital flows that are -- foreign direct investment, which is necessary for economic development. It'll provide opportunities to work collaboratively on strong strategic areas, security areas. One area will be -- there's a great opportunity for all of us to cooperate on the environment.

So I view the emergence of India and China as positives. I think it's going to be very important for the United States to stay engaged -- not only with the two nations; if I were Thailand, I'd be asking, what about us, will you remember other nations? And the answer is, absolutely. And one way to do that -- the reason I brought up multilateralism is one way to stay engaged is through the mechanisms like the six-party talks on the Korean issue. Our vision is, once that issue gets solved, if North Korea verifiably gives up its weapons, programs, ambitions, then the six-party talks can serve as another mechanism.

ASEAN is a place where the United States can remain -- should remain actively engaged with nations who are saying -- say, wait a minute, we're your friends, as well. Don't just focus on the big guys, think about us.

APEC is another very important group of nations where we can work in a way that is beneficial, mutually beneficial. And so people may say, well, okay, fine, how can you -- I've gone to every APEC meeting, including the one right after September the 11th, 2001; I'm going to this one, even after our elections. I'll be semi-retired by the time I -- (laughter) -- I'll be still sprinting, but semi-retired.

And in terms of foreign policy in the Far East, it is mistaken if someone were to say that my preoccupation was on the war on terror. You bet I wanted to make sure that we protected ourselves at home. But that's the same sentiment other people have. Secondly, our foreign policy has been robust in the Far East. Our relations with your country, with South Korea, with Japan and with China have never been better. And it took a lot of work to get relations, bilateral relations as strong as they are. Not many Presidents could say, in the history of U.S. diplomacy, that relations with South Korea, Japan, China and Thailand are strong and robust.

A lot of times, if you're friends with one, you made it hard to be friends with another. So as a result of a lot of work, a lot of personal diplomacy, as well as a lot of active engagement throughout our administration, I can tell you that I am satisfied with the variety of relationships.

Secondly, we've worked on common problems together. Who would have ever thought that Japan would have forces in Iraq? Or South Korea would be alongside a lot of other nations in Afghanistan?

Q Need to send more. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. My only point to you is, is that -- or the Taiwan-Chinese relationship and that issue. It's a very sensitive issue for the Chinese government. And people who study this very closely will see that the issue is in a better place. And I made it abundantly clear that there was some red lines for the United States on this issue,

that there would be no unilateral declaration of independence, that our policy was still the same. It's very important for the President to be very consistent.

And my only point to you is, is that I'm very pleased with the state of relations now, and I recognize it took a lot of work to get them there. But I feel very comfortable in telling you that if there is a common problem, I've got personal relationships with the leaders where I can sit down and say, here's my point of view; what is yours? And if we have a common problem, let's work it out. We've had some common problems and some issues that have arisen, and yet, I will tell you that relations are very cordial and open and honest.

And so -- anyway, good question.

Yes, Mr. Li.

Q Yes. Thank you very much, indeed, President, for this opportunity and your time. And you know that it will be the 30th anniversary of establishment of the diplomatic relations with --

THE PRESIDENT: That's a true statement.

Q Yes. And I noted yesterday many ministers from your administration attended the inauguration ceremony of Chinese new chancellory building, Chinese embassy.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q So plus you've made important increase in the importance of bilateral relations. So my question is, how do you evaluate the current relations, the welcome of the bilateral relations for the last part of 30 years, especially near the eight years under your presidency?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much --

Q And which areas do you think two countries could broaden and deepen cooperation?

THE PRESIDENT: I do. First, I will be dedicating a new embassy --

Q Oh, yes, I'm sure you will preside over the new embassy.

THE PRESIDENT: I've got a new embassy going. So, yes, there was a deal here last night that people in my administration went to. But I'll just tell you what I'm going to. I'm going to the embassy -- the new embassy opening in Beijing. Isn't that interesting, two new embassies open the same year, obviously to celebrate the 30th anniversary of what has been a very important relationship.

It will be at that embassy opening that I will be joined by my father, who first introduced me to China in 1975. I went to visit him --

Q And so the friend of Chinese people.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. And so -- I spent my time riding a bicycle around Beijing. And there was no -- there was no high-rises. So the next time I go as President, and it was like going into another world. It was -- there were a lot of cars, a lot of skyscrapers.

Q And you didn't bicycle. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I did bicycle. I mountain biked with the Chinese mountain biking team, the Olympic team -- I rode with the Chinese Olympic team. As a matter of fact, I'm going to mountain bike again on the Olympic -- hopefully -- on the Olympic course, just to get some exercise. (Laughter.)

And so my only point to you is that this has been an evolving relationship, and we're both honoring the 30th anniversary of the relationship. The fact that both countries are honoring the 30th anniversary of the relationship shows that -- it's a statement about good relations. If we had bad relations we wouldn't be honoring the 30th. It would be, okay, here comes the 30th anniversary, who cares?

But this has got a -- opening new embassies in our respective capitals, and very fine embassies -- I.M. Pei did the one here, and I'm not sure who designed ours, but I know it's going to be a great embassy -- is a signal of how important the relationship is.

I mean, we'll let the historians evaluate the difference between what the relationship was like in the '80s, '90s, but I can tell you how -- my view. One, I've had good relations with -- good personal relations with Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Secondly, we have worked hard during my time to put strategic dialogues in place that broaden and enhance the relationship. So Secretary Paulson has worked with his two counterparts to deal with economic issues that are -- it's very important. It's very important for us; it's very important for other nations in the region, by the way.

And, you know, we're working the currency issue, or trade issues, or international property rights -- or intellectual property rights, I mean. And it's an opportunity for our two countries, who've got a interesting relationship, to be able to work through common problems and to seize common opportunities.

I've been committed to broadening our defense cooperation and exchanges. I think it's going to be very important for -- I know it's important for our generals and admirals to deal with their counterparts. And I believe, more importantly, or as importantly, we ought to be getting younger Chinese officers involved with younger U.S. officers. Why? To create a feeling of trust.

You ask how has the relationship evolved. The crisis of my administration, the first crisis, was the EP3. And it was like, oh, man, this is unbelievable. And it -- I will tell you -- and frankly, it took a while to get phone calls returned and we were just trying to get information. And I'm confident that if a incident like that happened now, there would be a much more immediate response because there's more trust between the two administrations.

And that's good for the region. It's good for our bilateral relations, and good for the region. So I would tell you that ours has been an evolving relationship that is in good, solid shape. And that's not to say that -- on any of these relationships, that there needs to be constant work. An American President has got to know two things: one, the nature of the person he's dealing with, and the nature of the government he's dealing with, and the pressures that government feels. And I've worked hard to be a sensitive, open-minded person to that end.

Gregory.

Q Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: How are you, lad?

Q Good, thanks.

THE PRESIDENT: Good.

Q A lot of people in Hong Kong talk about this. Looking ahead, do you think it's important for the American people to sort of view China mostly as a strategic competitor or more as a partner?

THE PRESIDENT: I would call it a -- I would -- I think as we look ahead I would view it as a management of a complex relationship, where sometimes our national interests are aligned and sometimes our national interests are not aligned. They could -- and let me just talk about the economy, for example. And one reason I call it a complex relationship is that here in America, trade with China is not necessarily universally accepted as good. It is universally accepted as good in this administration. I mean, free and fair trade is good for the world, and I believe it's good for this relationship. But it is a -- some in America view the advent of Chinese manufacturing, particularly at the lower end of the economic scale, as direct competition with their own livelihood, thereby making the relationship complex.

Energy. What's very interesting is that if you view China as a market, you want them to become more robust and more prosperous. But in order to do that, China is going to have to have more energy, and as China demands more energy, it creates more global demand relative to a slower growing supply means higher prices for us all.

It is a very interesting and important relationship made complex by globalization, and their constantly changing internal situation, particularly when it comes their economy.

I'm sure you've been reading about the Doha discussions. On the one hand, we've got very good relations. On the other hand, it was hard to find common ground to get the Doha deal closed. And so it's -- your readers have got to know that there's opportunity and there's challenges. So it's hard to label the relationship one way or the other.

I will tell you this: An American President is going to have to pay very close attention to relations with not only China but the region. And I say "the region" because if it ever -- if the perception is ever that the United States is fixated only on China, then you're going to have issues with long-time allies, people that have been counting on the American support for a period of time.

And so never can the foreign policy be viewed as zero sum. It's always got to be viewed as additive. And my worry for America over time is that we've become isolationist and protectionist. I've spoken about this quite frequently. Protectionism will be bad for our own economy and our world economy, in my judgment. Isolationism will create a lot of concern.

And so the United States has got a forward-leaning foreign policy in the Far East, and we have. When people take an objective look at this administration, we have been very much engaged. And I believe I'll be leaving office with the Far East in as good as shape as it can be from a U.S. perspective.

Kenneth. You've already had six questions. (Laughter.)

Q One other issue on this North Korea nuclear deal. I understand it's a headache and you're sprinting as fast as you can, but the North Koreans doesn't seem like they're keeping up with the pace. (Laughter.) So maybe you could give me some more breaking news on this end. (Laughter.) What about the delisting of North Korea from the terrorist list, what about the verification process, what about the North Korea --

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, no, no, no. Sprinting is one thing; undermining good policy is another. And multilateral diplomacy is the best way to peacefully solve an issue such as the nuclearization or the weaponization or the desire to have a nuclear weapon program by the North Koreans. I will do nothing to undermine the six-party structure, the credibility of the six-party structure, and our partners.

And therefore, to answer your question, we are very clear that in order to move forward in the phase that we're now in -- and this is a phased-in deal -- that there must be verification that we're all happy with, a verification mechanism on not only plutonium, but also highly enriched uranium, as well as proliferation.

Q -- weapons program as well.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, right. And we will obviously consult very closely with our partners. This will be a subject of discussion with the President. And I will be sprinting, but patient; sprinting, but realistic.

Q Okay. Is the North Korean human -- North Korean refugees, human rights issues will be discussed?

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely. As you know, I'm a believer in human dignity and human rights. I discuss it with all leaders. And I am -- for example, when it comes to China, we have constantly asked China not to send people back into North Korea. I want to thank the South Korean people for welcoming their brothers and sisters who have been able to escape.

Q It's what they need to do.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I know.

Q We thank you for --

THE PRESIDENT: It's not easy. We need to open up -- we have opened up our doors. And the first step -- the two things on my mind now in North Korea are getting rid of the nuclear weapons program, which, as you know, can be very destabilizing; when North Korea fires rockets or tests, it creates reverberations around the immediate area. And secondly is to recognize -- constantly keep in mind the human rights violations that take place there.

Pichai.

Q Mr. President, again, back to Bangkok, you were going to mention something about Burma, questions on Burma.

THE PRESIDENT: I did, yes.

Q Obviously it's an issue with human rights. Burma is a concern for the U.S. It's also a concern for quite a number of members of ASEAN. But there is a view again that that's one issue that's hindering a more advanced cooperation between U.S. and ASEAN as an organization. What's your view on this, your take on that?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think -- I don't think -- matter of fact, I think our relations are very strong. I think they've been strong on counterterrorism and the economy. There's a difference about how hard people should push for democracy in Burma. I'm at one end of the ledger. And we'll continue to press hard.

And I do want to thank the Thai government for its understanding of the refugee issue, particularly as relates to the border policy. I think it's been very wise and very humane. My message is going to be one directed to the people in Burma when I meet with some of the activists, and Laura is going to be meeting with some of the people that she got to know.

Tell you an interesting story. I included Burma in my last United Nations address, and it was a pretty strong statement. And she was in the audience there at the U.N. And just as soon as the speech ended she got an email from one of the activists she had met, a person that was trying to help deal with human suffering.

And I just thought it was interesting world we're in, in which the speech finishes, the word gets out, they email back to Mrs. Bush, or Laura, to thank me as I walked off the podium. Now, it's -- my only point to you is that it is very important for us to -- I understand pressures on countries, and I understand different interests. And I always try to put myself in the other person's shoes. But as I do so, I never forget certain basic fundamental values. And so we will be -- I will be, and Laura will be expressing our opinion in a way that is, I hope, very clear and hopeful to people. Thailand is a democracy.

Q We're having some problems.

THE PRESIDENT: Democracy is not easy, right?

Q Right.

THE PRESIDENT: On the other hand, it is a democracy, and they'll work through an issue, no question about it. The country next door to you is not and wants to hear that people remember them. See, one of my concerns is that we -- that America gets so comfortable they say, who cares; what does it matter whether or not somebody has got HIV/AIDS?

One of the things on ASEAN you ask about is that part of our AIDS initiative that I'm going to go sign a bill this afternoon, which is a firm commitment to dealing with disease is in Vietnam. Isn't that interesting?

And my only point will be that we are a compassionate country amongst a lot of other things. We are an idealistic country. We act for -- you know, we act -- at least this administration has -- not afraid to make tough decisions if needed, particularly given the world in which we live, in which there are people that are willing to kill the innocent to achieve their political objectives.

But we're also a very compassionate nation. And it's interesting that a nation -- you asked about ASEAN relations and bilateral relations -- it's interesting that a nation with which this country had been at war is now a country that is receiving HIV/AIDS help to help deal with a human catastrophe.

My trip to Vietnam, by the way, was a fascinating experience when I went. And it's an interesting marketplace economy that's beginning to grow.

Q It is.

THE PRESIDENT: Vibrant. And it provides great opportunities for people in the neighborhood.

Yes, sir, Mr. Li.

Q Yes. President, just a follow-up question to my first question. And you know the bilateral relations between China and the United States had been improved under your presidency, and now it's (inaudible). But what would be your expectation and predictions of the future bilateral relation under the new American administration, Republican or Democrat?

Q Yes, thank you. Well, the only thing I can tell you with certainty is what it's going to be like for the next six months -- sprinting to the finish. (Laughter.)

Our relations are becoming more and more interwoven and -- our economic relations are very, you know, intricate and -- you know, there's dependency in a way; there's a lot of capital gain invested; there's marketplaces; as I mentioned, a strategic dialogue that Secretary Paulson set up -- it's constantly evaluating different opportunities dealing with the current problems, but also dealing with strategic opportunities.

I would predict to you that whoever follows me will have a -- will be a combination of an active engagement with a constant reminder of our belief in human freedom and human liberty.

Q My second --

THE PRESIDENT: That's your third question. (Laughter.)

Q -- the Beijing, again, is a very important event, not only for China but also for the whole world. So your stance against politicizing the Olympic Games is highly (inaudible) by Chinese people. So what you would like to convey, your messages and wishes to the 29th Beijing Olympic Games and nothing special to Chinese people, because Chinese people has made tremendous efforts to ensure the Olympic Games is a successful event -- even sometimes they make some sacrifices.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Well, our message is, is that I personally and America respects the Chinese people -- respect your history, respect your tradition, and I'm honored to have been invited to the Games. And I make the case to people that by going to the Games and respecting the people, it gives me a -- it gives me credibility with the government so that we can deal with common opportunities and common problems.

And I'll have a bilateral with Hu Jintao, which I'm looking forward to. I enjoy the man. I find him to be a straightforward guy, I'm very comfortable in his presence, and we will talk about the kinds of issues we always talk about.

So for me it's going to be a real pleasure to see the Olympics. I'm a sportsman. I love sports. As I mentioned, I'm looking forward -- I hope I'll be riding my mountain bike on the mountain bike trail. I'll probably be taking the easiest route, because the hills looked quite steep the last time I was there.

And I'm going to go to see some of the events. As I understand it, I think we've got a chance to go see the United States basketball team versus China, which ought to be a pretty interesting event. I bet it's pretty noisy, as I understand the great Yao Ming -- (laughter) -- who plays for my old hometown, Houston -- the Houston Rockets -- foot is healed. I hope so, because it will make it a very interesting contest.

I look forward to watching the fan reaction and to seeing good healthy competition. I am fascinated by the Chinese Olympics teams' efforts to capture the most medals. I think good competition is very healthy. They're going to -- and so it'll be fun to watch, and it'll be really interesting to see not only the sports and to feel the atmosphere of the Olympics; I've never been to a summer Olympics before -- but also to cheer on my team, because our objective is to get more medals than anybody. That's what competition is about.

And if we do we'll be gracious in victory, and if we don't we'll be humble in defeat. But I will be there as the President of the country cheering the team when it comes in the Olympic stadium, going by different venues, and, just letting them know America is cheering for them. And so that's going to be exciting.

And as I say, there will be diplomacy. We're opening a new embassy. I'll have a bilateral dinner, a lunch with the President -- a meeting, and then I think his wife and my wife will join us, so it'll be a nice social occasion. And then there will be the Olympic Committees and all the stuff you're supposed to do.

Q But what kind of specific events you would like, you and Mrs. Laura Bush would like most, and you will watch during the --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Well, I like a lot of sports. Unfortunately, we're not going to be there -- the most exciting in many ways for kind of a baby boomer like me is the track and field. That's like -- that's it, to watch the sprinters and the different big events and --

MS. PERINO: Get some tips. Get some sprinting tips.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. (Laughter.) Sprinting tips. That's Kenneth. (Laughter.) We're not going to be there for that. So, you know what, we'll see. I'm pretty relaxed about it. Not every single minute of every day has to be totally organized, and so I'll be with a lot of my family and they're fun to hang around with. I'm sure we'll walk around the different venue sites and just get a sense for the whole -- the whole atmosphere of people from all around the world coming to Beijing to compete in the Olympic Games. That's going to be a proud moment for the Chinese people.

And I made a decision not to politicize the Games; this is for athletics. There's plenty of time for politics, and I'm confident I'll have time for politics and, you know -- look, I've met with the Chinese President a lot. This isn't like once every four years you sit down with the man. I meet with him all the time, it seems like, at these different forums where the United States is at the table with a lot of other nations in the region.

And I have got very cordial relations, and it's important to be able to have those kind of relations because he's got to tell me what's on his mind and I've got to tell him what's on my mind in order to be able to deal with problems. And I think when people study my presidency and find out how Bush conducted foreign policy, they'll see I don't shy away from things; I am not a shy person. And if we have a problem, we can discuss it. And so the first time I met with your President at Camp David, first South Korean President to ever go to Camp David, he came. I knew there was some potential problems. And I wanted to put him in a frame of mind, in an atmosphere where he'd feel comfortable.

Q Well, you have a knack to charm other leaders, and he was fascinated, actually.

THE PRESIDENT: He's an interesting guy.

Q Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: He told me a fabulous story about his -- you know, he's an elder of a huge church, and they asked him to be an elder. And he said, "No, I need to park cars to prove to myself and others that I deserve it in the first place." A very interesting story, I thought.

Q Are you worried about the air quality in Beijing? (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Am I worried about it?

Q Yes, do you worry about it? (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I'm sure I can adjust. I don't know. I'm going anyway. I mean, I will be there. And I don't know what it's like. The only way to find out is to go. I'm sure there's all kinds of stories.

I've read the paper today that the air quality was down. Who knows what it's going to be like? We'll deal with it.

Yes, last question. I've got to go to the electronic media, with people who have got beautiful faces. (Laughter.)

Q Well, continuing to talk about the leaders, the Chinese leaders, what has surprised you about your dealings over the last eight years with Chinese leadership?

THE PRESIDENT: That's an interesting question. One thing that interests me is to watch China's leaders deal with the benefits and challenges of a marketplace. In other words, this is a country that has got a lot of mouths to feed and a lot of people to employ.

And they are committed to, in many ways, marketplace principles, particularly as they have invited in foreign capital. And it's been interesting to watch them deal with a combination of the need for raw material versus the -- from the foreign policy implications of dealing with a country that has a lot of raw material. The classic case is Iran, where I have spent a lot of time with the Chinese President talking about the dangers of Iran having a nuclear weapon, knowing full well that they need fuel in order to meet their own internal pressures.

And I'll repeat to you, Hu Jintao has been very open in many ways about his concerns and the pressures he feels, as have I. And I feel comfortable. And by the way, that's not easy when there is a language barrier. And yet, I can report to you that we do have cordial, relaxed conversations -- in spite of the fact that we both have interpreters. It's much easier when you are dealing with a person that speaks your own language. Since the only one I speak is English, it's important to have English speakers.

But here is a man who I have had some -- I feel comfortable talking about his family, and he asks about mine. And that may sound trite to you, but nevertheless it's a part of getting comfortable with each other. So I guess what's interesting is to -- just understanding the tensions that an emerging economy can feel, and particularly given Chinese, the Chinese role in international affairs, for example, their presence in the U.N. Security Council, Perm 5, which creates interesting tensions.

I would say that there's been a -- it's just been interesting to watch, and interesting to participate with people. I mean, the Taiwan issue was a very touchy issue for a while, causing me to say in the Oval Office -- that which is now well-chronicled -- that the United States does not support a unilateral declaration of independence. Because I wanted to make sure that our message was clear, but also that the relationship was in a way not our relationship, but other's relationship with China was in a way that it could evolve peacefully and constructively.

Okay guys.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned about sprinting. Bullet points: what if you could guard -- just three points, what is left to be done in the sprint?

THE PRESIDENT: There is a lot left to be done. One, make sure that the six-party talks continue to -- are you talking about the Far East, or just in general?

Q Yes, the region. The region. Six-party talks, what else?

THE PRESIDENT: It was -- like, total agenda? There's a lot.

Q Sure. But I'm just saying --

THE PRESIDENT: But in the Far East -- absolutely. Six-party talks is one. Go to APEC and have a successful conclusion. Meet with ASEAN nations to leave the relationship in a solid way. Continue pressing hard on the

human rights agenda, human freedom agenda, a religious freedom agenda. There's three issues right there.

MS. PERINO: Your free trade agreement.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, free trade agreement. Absolutely. Concluding a relationship with -- continuing to work with Japan on their defense forces posture, particularly given OEF. I mean, there's a lot to be done.

And just to make sure that people understand the bilateral relationships are vital. Let's see, I've been to Japan three times as President. South Korea is going to be my second time. China four times. I mean, I have been there a lot. Is that right, four times to China? Yes.

MR. WILDER: And this is your ninth trip to Asia.

THE PRESIDENT: Ninth trip to Asia.

Q But still you will come --

THE PRESIDENT: I'm looking forward to it. You know the thing that amazes me? The South Korean women golfers. (Laughter.) Look at a women's -- have you ever looked at the scoreboard?

Q Yes, sure.

THE PRESIDENT: It's unbelievable.

Q I don't know --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, you're supposed to know. If you look at the scoreboard, it's phenomenal. You talk about an excellent athletic program.

Q It's actually a Korean-born, American-trained.

THE PRESIDENT: You think so? I'm not sure. I know the woman who won the LPGA, is that what it was -- won the Open is Korean-born, American-trained. But I'm not so sure --

Q Mostly they come -- like they go to -- school in Florida or Arizona, or something like that. So they --

THE PRESIDENT: All of them?

Q Like, I would say 80 percent. They come to U.S. They work out --

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. But they have got a pretty -- they must have a young girls' program that's pretty active too, to get people interested in the first place.

Q Yes, I think Korean women are much more disciplined than Korean men. (Laughter.)

MS. PERINO: That's not just in Korea. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all greatly.

Q Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Enjoyed it. Thank you, buddy.

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